

The Rev. Jay Lawlor “Proclaiming the Gospel Together” sermon for 12th Sunday After Pentecost – August 27, 2017

The Rev. Jay Lawlor was visiting priest at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, IN.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, US, February 23, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Rev. Jay Lawlor](#) was at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Indiana as guest preacher and Celebrant for the service of The Holy Eucharist on August 27, 2017. He preached a [sermon](#) titled "Proclaiming the Gospel Together" to the people of St. Paul's. Following is an excerpt of the Rev. Lawlor's sermon:



If we are to proclaim the Gospel together, in community, if our words and actions in such proclamation have authority, then we are to pray, discern, and deliberate together, in community.”

The Rev. Jay Lawlor

There is a wonderful little book by the late Henri Nouwen titled *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. In that book Nouwen wrote: “We cannot bring good news on our own. We are called to proclaim the Gospel together, in community.” (Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*)

Nouwen’s reflection goes to the heart of our New Testament readings this morning. Both Jesus, in the Matthew’s gospel, and Paul, in his letter to the Church in Rome, are speaking of Christian leadership. And not only ordained leadership. Not even primarily ordained leadership.

Jesus and Paul are speaking of discipleship. From where do we gain our authority as disciples? And how are we to carry out our mission, with its various ministries?

Jesus and his disciples enter the district of Caesarea Philippi, which is on the border between Israel and the home of the Gentiles. While there, Jesus wants to know about the public perception in the region when he asks his disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13) The disciples replied: “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” (Matthew 16:14) Jesus then asks about perception within his own group of followers: “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15) Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

Peter saying that Jesus is the Messiah is a huge deal. Others were known as being sent from God as messengers and prophets. But there could be only one Messiah (one Savior/Christ/Anointed One). Jesus tells Peter that in Peter’s confession is the foundation upon which the church will be built. A church, a movement, so expansive and so full of vitality that nothing will ultimately prevail against it. Then he tells Peter that there no longer will be any barriers between heaven and earth. Whatever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever is loose on earth will be loose in heaven. In other words, whatever the church discerns as a ‘yes’ on earth is a ‘yes’ in heaven and whatever the Church discerns as a ‘no’ on earth is a ‘no’ in heaven.

But we need to be careful. It is not just Peter with such authority. Two chapters later Jesus says the same thing to his other disciples. So we need to be especially careful. Jesus is saying there is great responsibility in discipleship, and we must take care to speak and act according to God's will – according to Jesus' teachings and example. In claiming Jesus as the Messiah – the Christ, we enter a community in which what we say and what we do carries responsibility beyond ourselves. So community is key.

Remember the Henri Nouwen quote from a few moments ago: "We cannot bring good news on our own. We are called to proclaim the Gospel together, in community." (Henri Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus)

If we are to proclaim the Gospel together, in community, if our words and actions in such proclamation have authority, then we are to pray, discern, and deliberate together, in community, God's purposes – not our own. Christian leadership, Christian discipleship is not about us. It is about God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The main structure of Henri Nouwen's In the Name of Jesus are instructive. First we must be rooted in prayer – for this is how we commune with God. Next, we must recognize that it is not a popularity contest. Nouwen stresses we must move from 'Popularity to Ministry.' This means we should know God loves us and that in fulfilling our mission we must each carry out the ministries we are given out of that love in community and service to others.

Finally, it is not about leading from ourselves but, rather, being led by God. It is not about our power or maintaining control. It is about being led by God to serve in humility. To do this we need to recognize we always have more to learn: we should be steeped in prayer, study, and discussion as community to discern the will of God in order to best serve all. [...]

A full copy of The Rev. Jay Lawlor's sermon is available at <https://www.therevjaylawlor.com/proclaiming-the-gospel-together-sermon-by-the-rev-jay-lawlor-aug-27-2017/>

The Rev. Jay Lawlor
The Rev. Jay Lawlor
317-296-3852
email us here

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